

Sermon for the 10th Anniversary of the International Lutheran Church of Zion

Pastor Don Hougard
Benediction Lutheran Church
Milwaukee, WI

July 4, 2015

Text: Psalm 66

Theme: Come and See – Come and Listen

In 2006 I took the biggest risk that I had ever taken in my ministry. Pastor Dan McMiller of our district office told me that there was a pastor from Africa, who was interested in becoming Lutheran, who needed a place for his congregation to worship. Would Benediction mind hosting them. We were already pretty busy with both the Hmong ministry and the German radio services that I was doing, but for some reason I said, “Why not?”

Pastor Gui and some of the members of the church at that time and some of the members of our Church Council met, and somewhat to my surprise my congregation liked the idea. I do remember one question from Zion. Someone asked whether we would ask you to leave if you got too big. I remember thinking, “Isn’t that what we want!”

But there were struggles in the beginning. The biggest one was from our insurance company. They didn’t like the idea at all. They wanted you to have an insurance policy, but you were not an official organization that could have one. I could only think of one solution. Officially, you would all have to become members of Benediction. That was also a big risk for many of you. Most of the Congolese Christians are either Pentecostal or Catholic. You might not have ever heard of Lutherans. But we took a risk together. Every Sunday afternoon we began to have the sound of beautiful African music coming from this church, and Pastor Gui shared what Lutherans believe from *Luther’s Small Catechism*. Together we have grown as brothers and sisters in Christ.

This is a day of praise to our God. It is a day to come and see and to come and listen.

I. Today we want to praise our Lord.

This psalm begins, “*Shout with joy to God, all the earth! Sing the glory of his name; make His praise glorious!*” Say to God, “*How awesome are your deeds! So great is Your power.*” Today is a day of praise. It is a day to shout our praises to God. It is a day to praise Him with our instruments and to praise Him in song! The Lord is glorious. He is mighty. He has done great things. He is holy, and He is merciful. We gather today to bless His holy name.

II. Why do we want to praise the name of the Lord?

The answer is, “Come and See.”

The next part of this Psalm states, *“Come and see what God has done, how awesome His works on man’s behalf!...For you, O God tested us; you reined us like silver. You brought us into prison and laid burdens on our backs. You let men ride over our heads; we went through fire and water, but you brought us to a place of abundance.”* Today our nation celebrates our Independence Day. Except for the Native Americans everyone in this nation came from immigrants. For people like me, my forefathers came to this nation almost 150 years ago when things were bad in places like Denmark and Germany. My family can’t even remember exactly why our forefathers came here, but we do know that it wasn’t because things were great where they came from. Very few people have ever thought, “Things are great where I live now. Let’s move to America.” People have come to this country because of things like war and poverty in the country where they were living.

Many of you experienced such things in your home country. You understand what these verses mean when they say, *“O God, You tested us... You brought us into prison and laid burdens on our backs... We went through fire and water.”* Some of you escaped war. Some had been imprisoned. Some spent many years in refugee camps. All of you searched for a better life in America. Then you came here, and it was not easy. College degrees that you had in Africa didn’t mean anything here. You didn’t speak the language or understand the American way of life. Many of your first jobs were tough.

Some of you might have thought about going back. My wife’s great grandfather did just that over 100 years ago. It was too hot in America, so he went back to Germany. But the Lord has blessed you here. He has blessed you in so many ways, with freedoms, a variety of goods and services, jobs, family, and even African brothers and sisters in America in this congregation. Look and see how good the Lord has been to you in this place.

He has also blessed this congregation. When you first came to Benediction, you were not many people, but my how you have grown! There are other brothers and sisters in Christ who have supported you throughout these years, such as Immanuel Lutheran – Brookfield, Trinity – Freistadt, and St John’s – West Bend. We have celebrated baptisms, weddings, and especially our Lord’s Supper together. We have cried together at funerals and memorial services. We have prayed with each other and for each other. But it didn’t stop there. Pastor Gui went to Africa. You have helped to train pastors, build churches, and encourage Christians in Africa. It is through your congregation that a relationship has grown between the Lutheran Church in the Congo and in the United States. But it still didn’t stop. New immigrants have been arriving in Appleton and Green Bay, and now you are ministering to them also. Look and see how God has blessed this congregation!

III. This should cause us all to come and listen.

The final verses of this psalm state, *“Come and listen, all you who fear God; let me tell you what He has done for me. I cried out to Him with my mouth; His praise was on my tongue. If I has cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened; but God has surely listened and heard my voice in prayer.”*

Listen to what your pastor preaches every Sunday. I know that his message each week can be summarized in just a few words, “Jesus Christ is your Savior.” Today people want to say that there

are many ways to God, but there is only one way. Jesus said, *“I am the way the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”* It is He who gave up His glory in heaven to come to this sinful earth. It is He who offered His sinless life on the cross as the payment for all of our sins. It is He who rose from the dead and promises that He is with us always. He will never leave us or forsake us. It is He who ascended to the Father in heaven and rules all things for the good of His people. It is He who will come again in glory and raise us from the dead, so that we will be with Him forever. It is He who has given us His Spirit, that we could be reborn as children of God and call upon God as “Our Father,” when we call on Him in prayer. Come and listen to your dear pastor, and you will hear the good news of Jesus Christ, your Savior.

Today is a day of praise to God. It is a day when we give Him thanks for all that He has done for us. Don’t ever take those blessings for granted, but listen to the Word of God, and He will bless you with a sure confidence and hope in your Savior Jesus Christ your entire life long.

Amen.

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